

Introduction

The Honolulu Engineer District

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers established the Honolulu Engineer District in 1905.¹ Until World War II the district concentrated on constructing, maintaining, and improving rivers and harbors; flood control projects; administering programs such as the Works Progress Administration; and constructing roads, trails, coastal gun emplacements, and other projects requested by military commanders.

On 16 March 1942, in accordance with a directive from the Secretary of War dated 28 February, the commanding general of the Hawaiian Department assumed complete jurisdiction over and responsibility for military construction activities, including administration of existing construction contracts. The commander delegated these responsibilities to the department's engineer officer. A week later a special order from the Office of the Chief of Engineers named this officer the district engineer of the Honolulu Engineer District and assigned him responsibility for the civil works activities of the district.² During the war Army engineers in Hawaii operated under three organizations.

- On July 1943 the small, peacetime Hawaiian Department was reorganized and expanded into the United States Army Forces, Central Pacific Area under the command of Lieutenant General Robert C. Richardson, Jr.
- The following July this command was renamed the United States Army Forces, Pacific Ocean Area, with responsibilities stretching from the Aleutian Islands southward to New Zealand and from off-shore waters of the American mainland westward to a hypothetical boundary of Japan and the China coast.
- The final wartime reorganization occurred on 1 August 1945 when the Pacific Ocean Area command became the United States Army Forces, Middle Pacific, (MIDPAC).

With the subsequent end of hostilities, MIDPAC's facilities and areas of responsibilities were gradually reduced.³

On 1 July 1946 the responsibility for new military construction and real estate activities in this area was transferred from the overseas Army commander back to

¹General Order No. 12, 1905, Office of the Chief of Engineers.

²Special Order No. 62, 23 March 1942, Office of the Chief of Engineers.

³*War Department Theater Histories, The Army in the Pacific Ocean Areas; Histories of United States Forces in Middle Pacific and Predecessor Commands During World War II, 7 December 1941–2, September 1945*, Prepared by Historical Subsection, G–2 HUSAFMIDPAC, 1–3.

the chief of engineers, who assigned that responsibility to the Honolulu Engineer District. Under Corps of Engineers command, the district performed these functions for the local Army command (and also for the Air Force command after it was established as a separate service) until 31 July 1950. The district continued to carry out its functions connected with the civil works program. Effective 1 August 1950 the Honolulu Engineer District was redesignated the Honolulu Area Engineer Office of the San Francisco Engineer District with no change in responsibilities.⁴

Before 1942 the Honolulu Engineer District had operated under the South Pacific Division, San Francisco. From 1942 to 1946 the civil works activities of the district were under the Pacific Division, Salt Lake City and San Francisco (1944); from 1946 to 1950 it was under the Western Ocean Division, Sausalito, California; and in 1950 it was placed under the South Pacific Division, Oakland, California.⁵ The Army Engineer Division, Pacific Ocean, was established on 3 June 1957 with jurisdiction over the Honolulu, Far East, and Okinawa districts.⁶

Several histories of the engineer wartime activities have been written. The basic history of the Honolulu Engineer District is Ellen van Hoften's *History of the Honolulu Engineer District, 1905-1965*, which the district published in 1970. The definitive history of the Army engineers in the Pacific theater during World War II is *The Technical Services, The Corps of Engineers: The War Against Japan*, by Karl C. Dod, published in 1987 by the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. *The War Department Theater Histories, The Army in the Pacific Ocean Areas; History of United States Forces Middle Pacific and Predecessor Commands During World War II, 7 December 1941-2 September 1945* contains a three volume history of the MIDPAC Engineer Section. "The Honolulu District and Pearl Harbor" by Lieutenant Colonel Willard P. McCrone is a typewritten manuscript dated December 1949. The three-volume history *Historical Review, Corps of Engineers, United States Army, Covering Operations During World War II, Pacific Ocean Area* was prepared to comply with a directive from Lieutenant Colonel Henry E. Helmholdt, Historical Officer, Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces, Middle Pacific. Eugene P. Dashiell prepared a complete index of the three volumes in January 1988; a revision is dated 17 November 1989. Erwin N. Thompson is the author of *Pacific Ocean Engineers: History of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Pacific, 1905-1980*, published by the Pacific Ocean Division in the early 1980s.

⁴General Order No. 9, 21 June 1950, Office of the Chief of Engineers.

⁵The history of the Honolulu engineers was drawn primarily from "Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Army Corps of Engineers (South Pacific Division) (Record Group 77)," compiled by Jo Ann Williamson, 1975, unpublished, Archives Branch of the National Archives and Records Center, San Bruno, California. See also Ellen van Hoften, *History of the Honolulu Engineer District, 1905-1965* (Honolulu: USAED Honolulu 1970), p. 63.

⁶General Order No. 11, 3 June 1957, Office of the Chief of Engineers.

A History of the Records of the Army Engineers in Hawaii and the Pacific Ocean Area

The records of the Corps of Engineers organizations in Hawaii since 1905 have been located in various repositories. After World War II the Pacific engineer records resided at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and later at the Army Records Center in St. Louis. In 1975 the National Archives–Pacific Sierra Region, San Bruno, California, received a shipment of records from the National Archives covering activities of the South Pacific Division from 1913 to 1942, the San Francisco District from 1879 to 1946, the Honolulu District from 1908 to 1940, and the Sacramento District from 1906 to 1943. The documents relate chiefly to planning, construction, and administration of flood control, river and harbor improvements, and similar civil works projects in Hawaii.

Extensive records of the Honolulu District's World War II activities in the Pacific theater of operations are now located in Record Group 338 in the Archives II facility in College Park, Maryland. The value of these records lies not only in the military information, but also for the broader social history they tell. Because Hawaii was under the rule of the U.S. Military Government for the duration of World War II, the Army engineers were involved in a wide variety of activities, such as prewar planning and practicing for full community mobilization and supervising the wartime control and distribution of building materials to civilian users. After the Pearl Harbor attack, the engineers planned for "scorched earth" destruction of military and civilian buildings in case of enemy invasion. The Army engineers also commandeered most of the civilian schools in Honolulu and converted their buildings for wartime use as administrative offices, hospitals, and other wartime activities. For a brief period, the U.S. government detained some aliens and American citizens of foreign birth in a Honolulu detention camp that had been constructed by the engineers.

While the MIDPAC materials in Record Group 338 consist mainly of general correspondence files, the contents of the folders are not limited to letters and messages. The collection also contains assorted blueprints, drawings, maps, charts, and photographs.

Some of the files in the records included in this inventory contain correspondence relating to projects dating from the 1920s and 1930s, such as territorial airfield construction, creation and inventory of roads and trails, creation of the network of coastal defense guns with its railroad logistical support system, and a string of island airfields from Hawaii to Australia initially intended to ferry aircraft to General MacArthur's Philippine air forces.

All documents cited herein are filed in archives boxes, each measuring approximately 15 x 11 x 5 inches. The documents are generally in good condition and quite readable. Unfortunately, many letters were never filed or were previously removed, leaving in their place sign-out cards. Numerous interstaff routing slips and "list of papers" forms, however, contain summaries of missing correspondence.

Using this Inventory

This inventory describes the contents of boxes G-46 through G-1001 with the following exceptions. Boxes G-50 through G-284 concern Hawaiian Department-wide functions rather than engineer-specific operations. Boxes G-496 through G-573 and G-677 through G-983 contain correspondence relating to actions of the attorney general of the United States. Therefore, none of these boxes are included in this inventory.

- Each box is identified as **Box G-xxx** [xxx refers to box number].
- Each folder within the box is identified in the following format:

Title and a War Department Decimal Filing System (DFS) number

- If the folder had no title or DFS, it is identified as “(unlabeled).” Under the folder decimal number, and/or title, is a short summary of the types of correspondence in the folder. Information in parentheses () appears on the documents or on the folders. Content notes of special interest to the historian who prepared the inventory are enclosed in brackets []. The inclusive dates of the correspondence are listed at the end of the summary. Specific dates identify events which occurred considerably earlier than the World War II period or have special significance, such as reports.

Subjects and Topics

The following list describes some of the types of information included in the records. It is not complete.

Air Ferry Route project
Sverdrup and Parcel Inc., St. Louis, contractors
airfield construction
Territory of Hawaii
various Pacific Islands
ammunition storage facilities

base development plans throughout Pacific area
blackout plans/exercises for Honolulu (1932-1941)
bombproofing and gasproofing
buildings, tunnels, and fortifications

cemetery sites
temporary and permanent, civilian and military

- chemical storage
 - chemical storage project (Schofield Barracks)
 - chemical impregnation plant (Schofield Barracks)
 - chlorine gas
 - Chlorpicrin gas
- civil defense facilities
- claims; of damaged civilian property
- coastal gun fortifications
- combat operations; reports by engineer observers
- construction
 - contracts
 - in-progress and completion reports (with photos)
- Dirax, Dirax Stations
- dredge operations
- electric power systems
 - Electric Power Control Board
- equipment; post-war, disposal of
 - Office of Liquidation Commission
- explosives
- Foreign Claims Commission
- Foreign Economic Administration/Commission
- fuel storage facilities
 - gasoline, diesel, and oil
 - War Reserve
 - Red Hill
- harbor construction
 - Honolulu
 - Keehi Lagoon seaplane lanes
- Hawaii Defense Project; 1927-1941
- immigration
- Kramer (Brig. Gen. Hans) Report; inspection of engineers' supply and financial systems
- lumber
 - Hawaii resources; shipments from U.S.

Markham (Maj. Gen. Edward M.) Report; 1937-1938
material and equipment
 allocation by Army engineers
 requests for by civilian companies
mobilization plans/exercises for Honolulu (1932-1941)
Motor Vessel *Southern Seas*; formerly *Lyndonia*
mutiny; alleged of Engineer Company (1944)

Office of Civilian Defense, Honolulu

Pearl Harbor; log of events by USED employee (Marcia Roach)
Penrhyn Island; U. S. claim of possession

radio (goniometric) and radar stations
railroads
 logistic
 artillery mounted
repair
roads and trails project (1929); reconnaissance reports

schools
 commandeered by Army Engineers for wartime use;
 Punahou School; USED wartime headquarters
scorched earth policy; plans for Hawaii
searchlights

underground aircraft repair facility; Schofield Barracks

war risk insurance
 dredges and other vessels; crews
water resources
 Hawaiian Islands (1918-1945)
 Marianas Islands
 Marshall Islands

Places, Installations, and Geographic Designations

This inventory uses the most common or current spelling of Hawaiian names of geographic places and military installations, even though they were not always spelled correctly or consistently in the documents.

Barking Sands Airfield
Bellows Field
Birkhimer Battery

Cristobal, Canal Zone

Fort Armstrong
Fort DeRussy
Fort Kamehameha
Fort Shafter

Hanauma Bay
Hickam Field
Hilo Airport
Honolulu Naval Air Station
Honolulu Sake Brewing Company
Honolulu, Oahu

John Rodgers Airport

Kahuku Air Base
Kapalama Basin
Kipapa Gulch

Maui
Molokai

Oahu
Oahu Army Personnel Center

Pahala
Pearl Harbor

Ryukyu Islands

Schofield Barracks

